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ABSTRACT

Issues of statewide control and coordination of higher education are discussed, based on the experience of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. The conclusions of two papers are also briefly considered: "State Control of Public Universities and Its Relationship to Academic Quality: Results of a National Study" (Frederick Volkwein); and "Toward the Study of Functional Linkages in Statewide Agencies for Higher Education" (Nancy Jo Westphal). Both papers suggest that existing program review mandated by a statewide board has little impact on quality at public, doctoral-granting research universities. The functions of the Indiana governing board have been performed differently according to the needs at different time periods. The period from 1971 to 1973 was one of growth and differentiation in and among campuses, while the period from 1974 to 1978 involved the development of technical competence and the establishment of databases to promote planning/decision making. The period from 1978 to 1985 included further database/computing development, and planning for cooperative ventures and technologies to provide access. Since late 1983, accountability has been emphasized. Since functions varied during these periods, the board's activities might give the impression of being neither integrated nor balanced. (SW)

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Comments on the Evolution and Integration of Coordinating Board Functions: Invited Critique of Current Research, Association for the Study of Higher Education Panel on Statewide Coordination of Higher Education, Chicago

March 16, 1985

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 15-17, 1985. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

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As one who entered state-level work in 1979 because I thought it was where the agenda for higher education would be defined and debated, and now leaves it for a public college campus, I reflected on the papers by J. Frederick Volkwein ("State Control of Public Universities and its Relationship to Academic Quality: Results of a National Study") and Nancy Jo Westphal ("Toward the Study of Functional Linkages in Statewide Agencies for Higher Education") with special interest. Both present insights into important issues of statewide control and coordination.

When reading the papers, I considered such features as the thesis, literature review, sample, analysis, and conclusions used and presented. I decided that my special contribution, given the time allowed, would be to comment on the broader context of statewide control and coordination and to reflect on the authors' conclusions from my perspective, rather than to dwell on technical issues.

Volkwein concludes that in his sample of public doctoral-granting research universities he found "little evidence to support the claim that freedom from external academic and financial control is associated with faculty and student quality." Rather, he found, "that the significant differences in quality among institutions are explained by differences in state generosity

and campus size." So, if a public doctoral-granting research university wants to have high quality faculty and students, it should be large and in a generous state!

Westphal concludes first that consolidated governing boards exhibit greater potential than coordinating boards for effectively linking the responsibilities of budget review, program review, and planning. Second, she concludes that both types of boards exhibit weak potential for effectively linking their authority for the review of existing programs with the responsibilities of new program review, budget review, and planning. All of this leaves me with the conclusion—if both authors are correct—that existing program review mandated by a statewide board has little impact on quality at public, doctoral-granting research universities. For the sake of the past six years of my life, I hope this is not true.

Both papers are concerned with the effects of statewide coordination and raise good questions. Both are concerned with the cumulative or integrated effects of statewide board functions and question their effectiveness. While I cannot speak for every board, or even for one class of board, I can comment from the perspective of one board. We might then have some hint of the complexities of such boards which are not addressed in these papers.

Like many other coordinating boards, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education was created in the early 1970's (1971) with three principal functions. First, it was given authority for planning in order to assist

the state in managing the growth of the higher education enterprise, to define missions and enrollment levels, and to maintain a plan which would ensure access to higher education for the citizens of Indiana. Second, it was given authority to recommend budget levels and the distribution of funding. Third, it was given authority to approve new degree programs, campuses, institutes, centers, and other organized academic activities in large part to manage growth and to limit unwarranted duplication. The authority to review existing programs was added later, as it was in many other states when subsequent legislation either added or clarified authority for reviewing programs.

Over the past fourteen years these three principal functions have been performed in different ways according to the needs of the time. The period of the late 1960's and early 1970's was a period of expansion and growth of regional campuses as the state developed and increased the number of structures and programs to provide access. The late 1970's and early 1980's comprised another period of expansion, especially in vocational, technical, and technological education. The early to mid-1980's have seen special emphasis given to the conservation of scarce resources, economic development initiatives, and increased access through extension efforts.

In my own agency, I have learned through reading early documents and talking with senior commission members that there has been a serial development of functions, with each stage of development building on the last and not clearly separated from either earlier or subsequent stages. Each stage of Commission development represents strong tendencies and

contains within it the continuing tension between a commission which reacts to institutional initiatives and one which initiates and takes "pro-active" stands. These stages of development were in response to the needs of the time.

The period from 1971 to 1973 might be called the period of the plan, a period of growth and differentiation in and among campuses and in the development of the concept of a statewide system embracing both independent and public higher education. During this period the broad outlines for the future development of higher education were identified. The period from 1974 to 1978 could be thought of as the period of developing technical competence and the establishment of numerous data bases which provide the foundation for planning and decision making. Data bases for costs, students, enrollments, facilities, equipment, and programs were conceived and over time were developed in order to give the state the capacity to comprehend the full system in ways which had not been available to either institutions or agencies.

The third period, which extended roughly from 1978 to the present time, included further development of data bases and computing capabilities, and might be considered the period of system building. This was the time during which commission staff and members gave special attention to raising the sights of institutions and communities to see a higher education world in which cooperation, new ventures, and technologies to provide access became reality. New incentives were created or discussed for developing cooperative ventures for increasing service. Initiatives which would

become reality only later were started during this period, including the program start-up fund, a fund of money to be released by the state budget committee to start new initiatives between biennial budget sessions upon the recommendation of the Commission for Higher Education and the State Board of Vocational - Technical Education.

Finally, starting perhaps in late 1983 and developing in 1984 and 1985 is the time which I call the period of accountability. Trends will be monitored closely, performance will be related to a set of objectives, uneconomic and inefficient programs will be reviewed rigorously, mission definitions will be constrained, and connections between state coordinating board functions, especially program review and reallocation, will be strengthened.

In each of these stages some functions received more emphasis than others; an observer, therefore, could have the impression that board functions are neither integrated nor balanced equally. However, I would argue that particular functions and authority are emphasized according to the needs of the time. In fact, not all forms of authority have been exercised, in large part because they have not yet been felt to be needed.

The needs of each period affect the issues raised. Thus, they also affect staffing patterns and the manner in which issues are addressed. At each stage, the Indiana Commission as an institution has had more experience and greater competence to choose its course of action and the functions to be emphasized.

If the landscape I have sketched makes any sense, what might we expect to see over the next hill? I think we will see a period of even greater state initiative. The signs are already evident, including the rapid decline of federal involvement. By state initiative, I do not mean the role which helps institutions look to the horizon and see that the sum can be greater than the total of the parts by cooperative efforts and imaginative ventures; I mean a period when the state will take a more active role in expressing its own desired directions for higher education, when funding proposals are initiated by the state for particular activities, particular programs, and particular efforts. During this period I would expect to see even greater exercise of the Commission's program review, mission, and enrollment authorities as part of planning and budget development.

At each step or stage, boards have choices. They can choose to give greater emphasis to bureaucratic concerns, to market considerations, to being reactive, or to taking initiative. The tension between a long-term and the short-term view is always present, and choices must be made. Research such as that presented today helps boards raise questions and consider their principles and actions in carrying out the related functions of planning, program review, and making budget recommendations.